POLMED
OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE

YOUR CARE POLMED

February 2025

"Love yourself enough to live a healthy lifestyle."

Anonymous

Dear Member

We're joining the trend this month of love – but with a healthy dose of focus on, well, health. After all, loving yourself enough to prioritise your health shouldn't just be for February. This prescription of self-care might not be a cure-all, but it's the start of a love story that will help you live longer and make managing chronic conditions less challenging.

So, swipe right on health and explore why cancer screening is vital. Our first article this month focuses on the top three cancers and the screening tests you can access as a POLMED member. Remember, early detection can save lives. Our second article explores treatment fatigue and how to overcome it.

And the chocolate box of health info would not be complete without our monthly infographics. This month, we're looking at the common myths around epilepsy and brushing up on the importance of dental hygiene for people with diabetes.

As always, we wish you a healthy, happy month ahead.
Regards,
YourCare Team

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WORLD CANCER DAY: SCREENING SAVES LIVES

In South Africa, **over 100,000** new cases of cancer are diagnosed annually, resulting in over **60,000** deaths due to cancer.

Despite these alarming statistics, many cancer-related deaths can be prevented through early screening.

World Cancer Day aims to raise awareness about cancer and encourage global action.

The most diagnosed cancers in South Africa are breast cancer, cervical cancer and prostate cancer. However, if caught early, the survival rate for these cancers can be over 90%.

BREAST CANCER

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women of all races.

Mammograms, which are X-ray examinations of the breast area, can reduce breast cancer mortality (deaths due to cancer) by **20 to 60%**.

While mammograms aren't generally recommended for women under 40, more people are being diagnosed with breast cancer at younger ages. You should consult your doctor if you are at higher risk.

CERVICAL CANCER

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women and the leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women. The risk for cervical cancer can be reduced by:

Regular cervical cancer screening:
A Pap smear is a vaginal examination that checks for abnormalities in the cells of the cervix.

HPV vaccination:
The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most significant risk factor for cervical cancer. HPV is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact and sexual intercourse. The HPV vaccine is recommended to help prevent HPV infection and lower the chance of developing cervical cancer later in life.

PROSTATE CANCER

Over **4,000** South African men are diagnosed with prostate cancer every year, accounting for **13%** of male deaths.

Screening for prostate cancer involves a digital rectal exam (DRE) to detect abnormalities or lumps in the prostate and a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test, which monitors a protein that enters the blood when there is a problem with the prostate.

A PSA level above 4.0 ng/mL is usually cause for concern, but your doctor will assess the risks and benefits to decide whether further treatment is needed.

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. If we don't act, the number of cancer-related deaths is expected to rise to 13.2 million per year by 2030. Regular screening and early detection can save lives.

Remember: POLMED offers screening benefits paid from Risk. These include mammograms, Pap smears, HPV vaccinations, and PSA tests. Please refer to your member guide or visit **www.polmed.co.za** to view your option-specific benefits in the 2025 Benefits Guide.

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INTERNATIONAL EPILEPSY DAY: END THE STIGMA

Epilepsy is one of the most common neurological conditions.

IT AFFECTS **50 MILLION** PEOPLE GLOBALLY

AND **51** OUT OF EVERY **1 000** PEOPLE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Yet a lack of understanding about the condition means there remains a stigma attached to it that negatively impacts the lives of those living with epilepsy.

International Epilepsy Day aims to raise awareness around the condition, prevent discrimination and create a more inclusive society.

THE FACTS

With proper diagnosis and treatment, **70% of people** with epilepsy can live seizure-free, productive lives.

If you experience any of the following symptoms, consult your doctor immediately:

Two or more unprovoked seizures

Anxiety

Stiff muscles

Loss of consciousness

THE MYTHS

MYTH: Epilepsy is a mental illness.

FACT: Epilepsy is a brain condition.

MYTH: You can swallow your tongue during a seizure.

FACT: It's physically impossible to swallow your tongue.

MYTH: Seizures are contagious.

FACT: Epilepsy isn't caused by viruses or bacteria, so it can't be contagious.

MYTH: People with epilepsy can't work.

FACT: Once seizures are managed and controlled, individuals with epilepsy can work in many different jobs.

MYTH: There is no treatment for epilepsy.

FACT: The majority of individuals with epilepsy can become seizure-free with anti-seizure medicine.

Many communities still have distorted views of epilepsy. Through education and support for those affected, we can ensure that individuals living with epilepsy get the treatment they need, and help change perceptions of this condition.

Remember to register your Epilepsy on our Chronic Medicine Management Programme:

POLMED uses a process called disease authorisation to approve the treatment of your chronic condition as a whole and not just a single medication. This gives you access to a whole list of pre-approved medication for your condition, which is referred to as a basket.

When you need to change or add a new medication for your condition, just take your new prescription to your pharmacy, and they will see if it is linked to your existing condition basket. If the new prescription is not linked, contact the Chronic Medicine Management Programme on **0860 765 633** with your prescription details.

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DIABETES AND YOUR GUMS

MORE THAN 4 MILLION SOUTH AFRICANS CURRENTLY LIVE WITH DIABETES.

One of the complications they face is damage to small blood vessels in the mouth, making them more prone to develop gum disease (periodontitis).

Research shows that people with diabetes are at even higher risk if they also have other conditions caused by damaged small blood vessels. For example:

DIABETIC NEUROPATHY (nerve damage)

Increases the risk for severe periodontitis by **36%**.

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY (damage to the retina in the eye)

Increases the risk for moderate or severe periodontitis by **21%**. This is because vision loss from diabetic retinopathy makes it harder to brush and floss effectively, leading to gum disease and eventually periodontitis.

Having both diabetic retinopathy and neuropathy increases the risk for periodontitis by **51%**.

High levels of sugar in the blood may also mean high levels of sugar in saliva, which can increase the risk for thrush (an oral fungal infection) and dry mouth – both of which may lead to gum disease.

If left untreated, periodontitis can affect quality of life, as it leads to **toothache, bad breath, difficulty chewing, and even tooth loss.**

ORAL HYGIENE

For those living with diabetes, good oral habits are essential.

- Visit the dentist at least twice a year.
- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss at least once a day.

Look out for signs of gum disease, which include:

- Swollen, red or bleeding gums, especially when brushing
- Pain when chewing
- Loose teeth
- Bad breath

We know that managing diabetes requires taking medicine as prescribed, monitoring blood sugar levels, following a healthy diet and exercising regularly. But it's also important to care for your mouth. Doing so can help prevent periodontitis and maintain your overall health.

Remember to register your diabetes on our Chronic Medicine Management Programme:

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TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH!

Treatment fatigue refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion that can occur from the long-term management of HIV.

This can manifest as a lack of motivation to adhere to medication schedules, attend medical appointments, or maintain a healthy lifestyle. It's a common challenge that can be managed with the proper support and strategies.

SIGNS OF TREATMENT FATIGUE

Skipping doses of medication

Feeling overwhelmed by the daily regimen

Decreased motivation to attend medical appointments

Emotional distress such as anxiety or depression

Physical symptoms like fatigue or insomnia

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT TREATMENT FATIGUE

Open communication: Talk to your healthcare provider about your feelings. They can offer support, adjust your treatment plan, or suggest counselling services.

Support groups: Joining a support group can provide a sense of community and shared experience. POLMED offers access to various support groups through the Aid for Aids programme.

Routine adjustments: Sometimes, small changes in your daily routine can make a big difference. Setting reminders for medication or incorporating it into a daily habit can help.

Mental health care: Don't hesitate to seek help from a mental health professional. Managing stress, anxiety, and depression is crucial for overall wellbeing.

Healthy lifestyle: Maintaining a balanced diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep can improve your energy levels and overall health.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

POLMED, in collaboration with the Aid for Aids programme, offers counselling services to help you manage treatment fatigue:

- Counselling services: Access to professional counsellors who specialise in chronic illness management.

At POLMED, your health is our top priority. We understand the challenges of long-term treatment and are here to support you every step of the way. If you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Stay strong, stay healthy, and remember, you are not alone.

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